



PARKDALE ARTS & CULTURAL CENTRE

CASE
STUDY



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CASE STUDY: PARKDALE ARTS & CULTURAL CENTRE

1313 QUEEN STREET WEST, TORONTO, ON

In 1998, Parkdale's former police station in Toronto's west end was ripe for a new life – one that would help revitalize the local economy and strengthen the community. The building had previously been converted into residential units, but remained in rough shape. The Metro Councillor, David Miller, helped secure the site for community use from its owner, the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto. Passionate arguments were made for a long list of community needs that the project could serve. A mix of arts, community and economic development organizations and individual artists were selected to become tenants, and Artscape was engaged as the facility operator. Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre (PACC) at 1313 Queen Street West marked Artscape's first foray into mixed-use development.

While the mixed-use model emerged more by happenstance than design, it quickly became apparent that it worked. Ground floor tenants Parkdale Business Improvement Association, Parkdale Community Development Group, Kababayan Community Centre and Gallery 1313 all work tirelessly to improve life in Parkdale while the artist tenants above them help bring the community to life. To make all this possible, the City of Toronto provided a few hundred thousand dollars of capital support, and a long-term nominal sum lease. Like other Artscape projects, PACC operates on a cost-recovery model without requiring ongoing operating grants.

THE PLACE

Parkdale, in Toronto's southwest end, has undergone a great deal of change since its beginnings as a desirable neighbourhood of large Victorian homes on Toronto's waterfront. Annexed by the City of Toronto in 1889, Parkdale south of King Street grew rapidly into one of the city's earliest commuter suburbs. The neighbourhood's streets were laid out to allow access to the lake to the south and to the area's main commercial thoroughfare, Queen Street, to the north. In 1922, "Toronto's Coney Island" – the Sunnyside Amusement Park and Bathing Pavilion opened, and South Parkdale became known as the "village by the lake". Although the neighbourhood had many grand homes, it was also the location of one-third of all Toronto's apartment houses.

The 1930s depression slowed development city-wide, and many of South Parkdale's large single-family homes were carved into multiple units, leading to an influx of working-class tenants to the neighbourhood. The development of the Gardiner Expressway in the 1950s destroyed Parkdale's direct access to the lakeshore and resulted in the demolition of large swaths of the community. With



the addition of thousands of relatively affordable units in apartment towers and houses in the 50s and 60s, the demographics of the neighbourhood continued to change. By 1970 the area was in economic decline, and the Parkdale Theatre, which had opened in 1920, had closed its doors.

In the early 1970s, the provincial government began to promote deinstitutionalization – thousands of patients diagnosed with mental illness were released from provincial public mental hospitals and placed in community-based care. The Queen Street Mental Health Centre, located at 1001 Queen St West, was one of the largest health facilities in the city. Many of the patients released there remained in Parkdale due both to its proximity, as well as to the large number of relatively affordable rental units there. It is estimated that by 1981, over 1,000 patients lived in Parkdale.

The 1990s and 2000s have seen Parkdale become known as a community of artists, as well as a popular neighbourhood for recent immigrants. Though new



businesses and art galleries, cafes and restaurants have moved into the neighbourhood (following Queen West's lead east of Dufferin Street), Parkdale has largely retained its distinctive character. Approximately 77 percent of Parkdale residents rent their housing, compared to a city-wide average of 32 percent.

"[Years] ago the bridge [at Dufferin Street and Queen Street] seemed like such an impediment. It seemed as though nothing could pass it. Nothing could survive on the other side. There were little flourishes, mostly galleries, but a lot didn't survive."

—RESIDENT OF THE PARKDALE ARTS AND CULTURAL CENTRE

Today, Parkdale is transforming into a hip neighbourhood – through the hard work of several community and neighbourhood organizations (many of which are housed within PACC), the neighbourhood has shrugged off the stigma it once had while embracing the rich diversity that makes it unique.

As is so often the case in neighbourhoods undergoing this kind of transformation, artists and those who would like to support their continued reinvention of this community will need to work hard to ensure that they are not priced out of the neighbourhood as Parkdale's real estate prices rise.

"For many who know the area, the South Parkdale section of Queen Street represents the final frontier of the street's artistic, cultural and social transformation."

—SLATER, T. (2005). *TORONTO'S SOUTH PARKDALE NEIGHBOURHOOD: A BRIEF HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT, DISINVESTMENT, AND GENTRIFICATION*. UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, CENTRE FOR URBAN AND COMMUNITY STUDIES



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Click here to watch Phil Anderson, Director of Gallery 1313 at Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre, discuss the transformation of Parkdale.

THE SPACE

The Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre, at 1313 Queen Street West, was originally built as a police station (6 Division) in 1931. The building's Art Deco style, particularly the design of the entranceway and protruding clock, make it a landmark in the neighbourhood. The building still

contains vestiges of its previous incarnation, including cells, a shooting gallery and a horse stable.

Today, the 13,000-square-foot building provides office spaces for community based not-for-profits, an artist-run gallery on the ground floor and nine artist live/work studios on upper floors, all rented to tenants at below-market rates. Gallery 1313 attracts thousands of visitors every year and supports the work of hundreds of local artists. The Parkdale Village Business Improvement Area (BIA) and Parkdale Community Development Group have developed a myriad of programs and initiatives to improve the life of Parkdale and its residents (including the Queen West Art Crawl). The Vietnamese Youth and Women's Community and Social Service Association and Kababayan Community Centre provide settlement and outreach programs for culturally-specific communities. Many of the live/work tenants are engaged in the artistic life of the neighbourhood. Together this spectrum of people and programs has had a profound effect on the development of Parkdale since opening in 1998.

THE SITUATION

The police station at 1313 Queen Street West remained operational until the early 1960s, when it was decommissioned and converted into emergency housing for the City of Toronto. Within 14 years, however, it was deemed ineffective as emergency housing and became Metro Toronto Housing property, ultimately sitting abandoned. From 1994 to 1995, the vacant building became a refuge for squatters and occasionally used as a location for film shoots. Eventually, a fire in the former stables drew attention to the poor state of the structure and Metro Toronto Housing deemed the building surplus. The property was offered to City and Metro agencies. When no one expressed an interest in the building, 1313 Queen Street West was slated for sale.

Several agencies in Parkdale suggested uses for the building, including a student residence and a social

service hub. The Parkdale Village BIA and a group of artists known as the Parkdale Village Arts Collective (PVAC) both saw potential in the vacant building to become a centre of arts and culture in the community. The local councillor at the time, David Miller, was convinced that the building should be retained for a community benefit. With this in mind, Artscape was approached to undertake a feasibility study to determine if the building could be converted into affordable live/work space for artists.



Click here to review historic and exterior photo galleries of the Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre.

THE VISION

Vacant for two years, in 1996 Metro Toronto asked Artscape to conduct a feasibility study on the conversion of 1313 Queen Street West. The vision for the Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre that emerged from this report was the restoration and adaptive re-use of the architecturally and historically significant neighbourhood landmark into a mixed-use community hub. Given the building's location and existing multi-unit interior configuration, it could be easily converted for artist and community use. The surrounding community was anxious to see this kind of development. A number of the nine existing residential units were quite large, and the four and five-bedroom units could be converted to community space, while altering the remaining units to ensure nine residential units remained after construction. It was eventually decided that the upper floors of the building would provide affordable, high quality legal live/work accommodation for artists, while the ground floor would contain the Parkdale Village BIA and PVAC, as well as other local not-for-profit organizations.

THE PLAN

Councillor Miller acted as the project champion and facilitator, leading the fight for the facility and negotiating its creation. The office of Cultural Affairs of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto led by Kathleen Sharpe (who would later serve as volunteer Chair of Artscape for 9 years) also played an important role in advancing the project on the bureaucratic side. The final deal Miller helped to negotiate gave local organizations, including the BIA and PVAC, enough space at 1313 Queen Street West to



Click here to watch David Miller, Counsel, International Business & Sustainability, Aird & Berlis LLP, and Mayor of Toronto from 2003 to 2010 discuss the development of the Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre.

satisfy their needs. Artscape took the rest of the building to develop and manage as affordable artist live/work studios. The Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto leased 1313 Queen Street West to Artscape to manage and operate on a \$1-per-year lease for a 20-year period.

The opening of the Parkdale Arts & Cultural Centre at 1313 Queen Street West marked Artscape's first foray into mixed-use development in a project that combined low-cost artist live/work studios with business associations and other social service organizations. Original tenants included Gallery 1 313, Kababayan Community Centre, Vietnamese Youth and Women's Community and Social Service Association, Parkdale Village BIA, Parkdale Community Development Group, Mariposa Folk Foundation and the Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre Community Board.

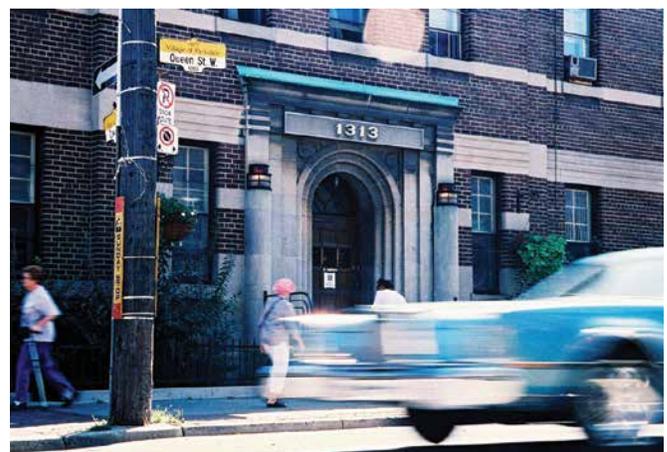


Click here to review project materials, including Artscape's Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre Feasibility Study.

DESIGN/BUILD

Unlike many other Artscape projects, the renovations at the Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre were not extensive. The exterior of the structure was very solid and was retained without significant renovation. The majority of the renovation work concentrated on the interior living and working spaces. The building had been used for both residential and institutional purposes in the past, and so the space was easily adapted for its new use.

The renovations and redesigns focused on ensuring that the structure met all applicable building codes and safety regulations. Recognizing the heritage value of the property, architect Joe Lobko focused on the adaptive re-use of the building by fixing specific problems without redesigning or modifying the structure.



OPERATE

Like other Artscape-run projects, the Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre is designed to provide below-market rental rates while operating on a cost-recovery basis. The fact that the project carries no debt and is provided to Artscape at a nominal-sum lease rate makes this possible without subsidy typically provided to affordable housing projects.



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Click here to watch architect Joe Lobko, OAA, FRAIC, LEED® AP, Principal, du Toit Allsopp Hillier | du Toit Architects Limited discuss the adaptive re-use of the old Parkdale Police Station.

The Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre has an unusual governance model, created to ensure adequate community stewardship of the non-residential part of the project. While live/work tenants each have a relationship with Artscape individually, community organizations pay rent to a community board which leases space from Artscape.

PVAC eventually evolved into Gallery 1313 and continues to promote positive change in the local community through its exhibitions of local and international artists.

“It’s a borrowed building and a repurposed building, but it is the one permanent thing for us. This building originally was a vanguard, it helped to nail down a respectable corner in the neighbourhood. And in the future [it] will act as an equilibrium if the neighbourhood continues to go the way [that] it is.”

—RESIDENT OF THE PARKDALE ARTS AND CULTURAL CENTRE

LESSONS

The greatest challenge to the success of the Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre were encountered at the early stages, when multiple local groups vied for space. Councillor David Miller, then a newly-minted local politician, pushed for the project and led the negotiations between the city and various interested parties. Having a strong project champion who helped shape a strong shared vision for the project was essential to the centre’s success. What was regarded by many at the time as a marriage of convenience between arts and community groups became one of Toronto’s early examples of a “community cultural hub” and as such a helpful precursor to Artscape Wychwood Barns and Daniels Spectrum in Regent Park.



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Click here view architectural drawings and floorplans of the Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre.

The small scale of the building made it realistic and manageable for all parties involved. Artscape was confident that it could renovate the facility quickly and cheaply enough to keep rents affordable for tenants.

When it was first conceived, the neighbourhood was considered unsafe by many; the goal of providing affordable housing for artists had more to do with ensuring safe, legal and high quality housing and working environments. Today, creative workspace in the Parkdale neighbourhood is in high demand, and so the Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre is now an anchor of arts and creative practice in the area.



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